

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- [c1] 1. A method for an item ordering service to present actual delivery date information to a customer at time of order placement for each of multiple fulfillment plan options available for use in fulfilling the order, the method comprising, upon receiving an indication from a customer of one or more items for delivery to a recipient:
- determining multiple distinct fulfillment plans for supplying the items to the recipient, each fulfillment plan indicating for each of the items that the item is to be shipped from an indicated one of multiple geographically distributed item distribution centers and indicating a manner of shipping the items from the indicated item distribution centers;
  - for multiple of the determined distinct fulfillment plans,
    - determining a cost of use for that fulfillment plan if the items are supplied using that fulfillment plan; and
    - determining an actual delivery date for that fulfillment plan on which the recipient will receive the items if the items are supplied using that fulfillment plan;
  - providing to the customer an indication of each of multiple of the determined fulfillment plans as options for supplying the items to the recipient, each indication of a determined fulfillment plan option including the determined cost of use and the determined actual delivery date for that determined fulfillment plan option; and
  - after an indication from the customer to use a selected one of the indicated determined fulfillment plan options, indicating to place an order for

the items to be delivered to the recipient using the selected fulfillment plan,  
so that the customer will receive options for how an order is to be fulfilled and will receive accurate delivery date information for the order at the time of order placement.

[c2] 2. The method of claim 1 wherein the received indication of the items represents a potential order for those items based on a determination of possible interest of the customer in ordering those items, and wherein the providing to the customer of the indications of the determined fulfillment plans is performed before an indication to initiate an ordering process for the items is received from the customer.

[c3] 3. The method of claim 1 wherein the received indication of the items represents an order for those items for which an ordering process has been initiated by the customer but not completed, and wherein the providing to the customer of the indications of the determined fulfillment plans is performed as part of completing the ordering process.

[c4] 4. The method of claim 1 wherein the received indication of the items represents an order for those items for which an ordering process by the customer has been completed, and wherein the providing to the customer of the indications of the determined fulfillment plans includes providing an indication that one of the determined fulfillment plans has been automatically selected and will be used to supply the items to the recipient unless an optional override instruction is received.

[c5] 5. The method of claim 4 wherein the indication from the user to use the selected one fulfillment plan is a received override instruction to use a

fulfillment plan selected by the customer that differs from the automatically selected fulfillment plan.

[c6] 6. The method of claim 4 wherein the provided indication of the automatically selected fulfillment plan includes an indication of a time limit by which the override instruction must be received for it to be effective, and wherein the indication from the user to use the selected one fulfillment plan is an absence of receiving an override instruction by the time limit, such that the selected one fulfillment plan to be used will be the automatically selected fulfillment plan.

[c7] 7. The method of claim 1 wherein the item ordering service is a Web-based service, and wherein the providing of the indications of the determined fulfillment plan options includes displaying the indications of the determined fulfillment plan options to the customer via a transmitted Web page.

[c8] 8. The method of claim 1 wherein the provided indication for each at least some of the determined fulfillment plans describes how that fulfillment plan will be performed.

[c9] 9. The method of claim 1 including, before the providing of the indications, selecting one of the determined fulfillment plans as a default for use in fulfilling the order, the selecting based at least in part on the determined actual delivery date for that fulfillment plan, and wherein an indication of the selected fulfillment plan that is provided to the customer indicates that the selected fulfillment plan is the default.

[c10] 10. The method of claim 9 including receiving an indication of preferred ordering instructions for the customer, and wherein the selecting of the one fulfillment plan as a default is based on the preferred ordering instructions.

[c11] 11. The method of claim 1 including receiving an indication of preferred ordering instructions for the customer, and wherein the determining of the fulfillment plans is performed in such a manner that each of the determined fulfillment plans is consistent with the preferred ordering instructions.

[c12] 12. The method of claim 11 wherein the preferred ordering instructions correspond to a predefined default ordering option for the customer that indicates the customer to be the recipient.

[c13] 13. The method of claim 1 wherein the determining of the actual delivery date for a fulfillment plan includes:

for each item distribution center indicated by the fulfillment plan to ship one or more indicated items, determining a date at which those indicated items will be received by the recipient based at least in part on a determined time at which the items will be ready to be shipped from the item distribution center and on an amount of time for shipping the items to the recipient; and  
selecting a last of the determined dates as the actual delivery date for the fulfillment plan.

[c14] 14. The method of claim 1 wherein the determining of the cost of use for a fulfillment plan includes:

modeling at least some future costs of supplying expected future orders to recipients if the indicated items are supplied to the recipient using the fulfillment plan;  
determining at least some of multiple costs that are directly attributable to using the fulfillment plan to supply the items to the recipient;  
assigning costs to at least some of one or more reductions in customer goodwill that result from using the fulfillment plan to supply the items to the recipient; and

totaling the modeled future costs, the determined directly attributable costs, and the assigned customer goodwill reduction costs.

[c15] 15. The method of claim 1 wherein at least some of the determined fulfillment plans additionally indicate one or more processing lanes to be used at each of the indicated item distribution centers or a manner for an indicated item distribution center to acquire at least some of the items of the order.

[c16] 16. A method for providing to a customer information about actual fulfillment of an order before completion of an ordering process for the order, the method comprising:

receiving from a customer an indication of one or more items; and  
upon receiving the indication,

determining one or more fulfillment plans that are options for fulfilling an order for the items, each fulfillment plan indicating one or more distribution centers from which the items of the order are to be transported to a recipient;

for each of at least some of the determined fulfillment plans, determining a time of actual delivery of the items if that fulfillment plan is used to fulfill the order, the determining of actual delivery time based at least in part on information determined about processing that would take place at the distribution centers indicated by the fulfillment plan and on information about transporting of the items from those indicated distribution centers to the recipient;

selecting one of the determined fulfillment plans to be used for fulfilling the order; and

providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery time for the selected fulfillment plan.

[c17] 17. The method of claim 16 wherein the received indication of the items represents a potential order for those items, and wherein the providing to the

customer of the information is performed before an indication to initiate the ordering process for the potential order is received from the customer.

[c18] 18. The method of claim 17 wherein the providing to the customer of the information includes providing information to enable the customer to initiate the ordering process for the potential order in such a manner as to use the selected fulfillment plan for fulfilling the potential order.

[c19] 19. The method of claim 18 wherein the information is provided as part of a Web page transmitted to the customer, and wherein the provided information to enable the customer to initiate the ordering process so as to use the selected fulfillment plan includes a displayed control that is selectable by the customer to perform the initiating of the ordering process.

[c20] 20. The method of claim 16 wherein the received indication of the items is part of the ordering process for an order for the items that has been initiated by the customer but not completed, and wherein the providing to the customer of the information is performed as part of completing the ordering process.

[c21] 21. The method of claim 20 wherein the providing to the customer of the information includes providing information to enable the customer to complete the ordering process for the order in such a manner as to use the selected fulfillment plan for fulfilling the order.

[c22] 22. The method of claim 21 wherein the information is provided as part of a Web page transmitted to the customer, and wherein the provided information to enable the customer to complete the ordering process so as to use the selected fulfillment plan includes a displayed control that is selectable by the customer to perform the completing of the ordering process.

[c23] 23. The method of claim 16 wherein the received indication of the items represents an order for those items for which the ordering process will complete without further interaction by the customer unless the customer intervenes within a limited period of time, and wherein the providing to the customer of the information includes providing an indication that the selected fulfillment plan will be used to fulfill the order unless the customer intervenes within the limited period of time.

[c24] 24. The method of claim 23 including receiving an indication of an intervention by the customer within the limited period of time to use a fulfillment plan other than the selected fulfillment plan, and indicating to use the other fulfillment plan for fulfilling the order.

[c25] 25. The method of claim 23 wherein the customer does not intervene within the limited period of time, and including indicating to use the selected fulfillment plan for fulfilling the order.

[c26] 26. The method of claim 23 wherein the providing to the customer of the information includes providing information to enable the customer to intervene in such a manner as to indicate an alternative fulfillment plan for fulfilling the order.

[c27] 27. The method of claim 26 wherein the information is provided as part of a Web page transmitted to the customer, and wherein the provided information to enable the customer to intervene includes a displayed control that is selectable by the customer to indicate the alternative fulfillment plan for fulfilling the order.

[c28] 28. The method of claim 16 including, after the ordering process for the order has completed, providing information about actual processing that has taken place as part of fulfilling the order using the selected fulfillment plan.

[c29] 29. The method of claim 28 wherein the information about the actual processing is provided as part of a generated Web page.

[c30] 30. The method of claim 28 wherein the information about the actual processing is provided to the customer.

[c31] 31. The method of claim 28 wherein the information about the actual processing is provided to the recipient.

[c32] 32. The method of claim 16 wherein actual delivery times are determined for at least one fulfillment plan other than the selected fulfillment plan, and including providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery times for at least one of the other fulfillment plans.

[c33] 33. The method of claim 32 wherein the providing to the customer of the determined actual delivery times for the other fulfillment plans includes providing information to enable the customer to indicate to use one of the other fulfillment plans for fulfilling the order.

[c34] 34. The method of claim 33 wherein the provided determined actual delivery times for the other fulfillment plans are part of a Web page transmitted to the customer, and wherein the provided information to enable the customer to indicate to use one of the other fulfillment plans for fulfilling the order includes one or more displayed controls that are selectable by the customer to perform the indicating of the other fulfillment plan.

[c35] 35. The method of claim 16 including determining a cost associated with at least some of the determined fulfillment plans, and wherein the provided



information to the customer about ordering the items includes an indication of the determined cost associated with the selected fulfillment plan.

[c36] 36. The method of claim 35 including providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery time and the determined associated cost for at least one fulfillment plan other than the selected fulfillment plan.

[c37] 37. The method of claim 35 wherein the associated cost for a fulfillment plan reflects a cost that will be charged to a customer for using the fulfillment plan.

[c38] 38. The method of claim 35 wherein the associated cost for a fulfillment plan reflects a cost that will be incurred by a supplier of the items for using the fulfillment plan.

[c39] 39. The method of claim 35 wherein the associated cost for a fulfillment plan includes costs that are directly attributable to using the fulfillment plan to supply the items to the recipient.

[c40] 40. The method of claim 35 wherein the associated cost for a fulfillment plan includes modeled future costs of supplying expected future orders to recipients if the items are supplied to the recipient using the fulfillment plan.

[c41] 41. The method of claim 35 wherein the associated cost for a fulfillment plan includes costs assigned to reductions in customer goodwill that result from using the fulfillment plan to supply the items to the recipient.

[c42] 42. The method of claim 16 wherein the provided information to the customer about ordering the items includes one or more displayed controls that

are selectable by the customer to specify options related to using the selected fulfillment plan to fulfill the order.

[c43] 43. The method of claim 16 wherein the provided information for the selected fulfillment plan includes an indication of one or more processing lanes to be used at each of the distribution centers indicated for the selected fulfillment plan.

[c44] 44. The method of claim 16 wherein the provided information for the selected fulfillment plan includes an indication of a manner of acquiring at least some of the items.

[c45] 45. The method of claim 16 wherein the provided information for the selected fulfillment plan includes an indication of a priority for fulfilling the order.

[c46] 46. The method of claim 16 wherein the provided information for the selected fulfillment plan includes an indication of a manner of processing at least some of the items at the distribution centers indicated for the selected fulfillment plan.

[c47] 47. The method of claim 16 including receiving an indication of ordering instructions for the customer, and wherein the determining of the fulfillment plan options and/or the selecting of the one fulfillment plan are based on the ordering instructions.

[c48] 48. The method of claim 47 wherein the ordering instructions correspond to a predefined default ordering option for the customer.

[c49] 49. The method of claim 16 wherein the recipient is the customer.

[c50] 50. The method of claim 16 wherein the transporting of the items is by shipping the items.

[c51] 51. The method of claim 16 wherein the transporting of the items includes a physical moving of the items.

[c52] 52. The method of claim 16 wherein the actual delivery time is a future date.

[c53] 53. The method of claim 16 including indicating to order the items using the selected fulfillment plan.

[c54] 54. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computing device to provide to a customer information about actual fulfillment of an order before completion of an ordering process for the order, by performing a method comprising:

receiving from a customer an indication of one or more items; and

after receiving the indication,

for each of at least one or more fulfillment plans that are options for fulfilling an order for the items and that each indicate one or more distribution centers from which the items of the order are to be transported to a recipient, determining an actual delivery date of the items if that fulfillment plan is used to fulfill the order, the determining of the actual delivery date based at least in part on information about processing that would take place at the distribution centers indicated by the fulfillment plan and on information about transporting of the items from those indicated distribution centers to the recipient;

selecting one of the fulfillment plans to be used for fulfilling the order; and

providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery date for the selected fulfillment plan.

[c55] 55. The computer-readable medium of claim 54 wherein actual delivery dates are determined for at least one fulfillment plan other than the selected fulfillment plan, and wherein the method further comprises providing to the customer information about the determined actual delivery dates for at least one of the other fulfillment plans in such a manner as to allow the customer to select one of the other fulfillment plans to be used for fulfilling the order.

[c56] 56. The computer-readable medium of claim 54 wherein the computer-readable medium is a memory of a computing device.

[c57] 57. The computer-readable medium of claim 54 wherein the computer-readable medium is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal containing the contents.

[c58] 58. The computer-readable medium of claim 54 wherein the contents are instructions that when executed cause the computing device to perform the method.

[c59] 59. A computing device for providing to a customer information about actual fulfillment of an order at a time of placing the order, comprising:  
a plan determiner component that is capable of determining one or more fulfillment plans that are options for fulfilling an order for one or more indicated items, each fulfillment plan indicating one or more distribution centers from which the items of the order are to be transported to a recipient;  
an actual delivery time determiner component that is capable of, for each of at least some of the determined fulfillment options, determining a time of actual delivery of the items if that fulfillment plan is used to fulfill the order; and

an information provider component that is capable of providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery time for one of the determined fulfillment plans selected to be used for fulfilling the order.

[c60] 60. The computing device of claim 59 wherein the plan determiner component, the actual delivery time determiner component, and the information provider component are executing in memory of the computing device.

[c61] 61. The computing device of claim 59 wherein the actual delivery time determiner component determines a time of actual delivery of the items if a fulfillment plan is used to fulfill the order based at least in part on information about a manner of processing the items at the distribution centers indicated by the fulfillment plan.

[c62] 62. A computer system for providing to a customer information about actual fulfillment of an order, comprising:

means for determining one or more fulfillment plans that are options for fulfilling an order for one or more indicated items, each fulfillment plan indicating one or more distribution centers from which the items of the order are to be transported to a recipient;

means for, for each of at least some of the determined fulfillment options, determining a time of actual delivery of the items if that fulfillment plan is used to fulfill the order; and

means for providing information to the customer about ordering the items that includes the determined actual delivery time for one of the determined fulfillment plans selected to be used for fulfilling the order.

[c63] 63. A method for presenting information to a user about actual fulfillment of an order that will result from using each of multiple options for fulfilling the order, the method comprising:

receiving an indication of an order;

for each of multiple distribution centers, determining at least one option for fulfilling the order from that distribution center that includes a manner of shipping the order to a recipient;

for each of multiple of the determined options, determining an actual provision date on which the order will be provided to the recipient if that determined option is used for fulfilling the order; and

presenting information to the user for each of multiple of the determined options, the information presented for each determined option including the determined actual provision date for that determined option,

so that the user can select one of the determined options to be used to fulfill the order based at least in part on the actual provision date for the selected option.

[c64] 64. The method of claim 63 wherein the order is a potential order that is indicated before an instruction has been received to place the order.

[c65] 65. The method of claim 63 wherein the presenting of the information to the user includes generating one or more Web pages for display to the user.

[c66] 66. The method of claim 63 wherein the presenting of the information to the user includes presenting one or more controls selectable by the user to indicate one of the determined options.

[c67] 67. The method of claim 63 including receiving an indication from the user of one of the determined options and using the indicated option to fulfill the order.

[c68] 68. The method of claim 63 including, before the presenting of the information, selecting one of the determined options as a preferred option for fulfilling the order, and wherein the presented information indicates that the selected option is the preferred option.

[c69] 69. The method of claim 63 including, after the order is placed but before the actual provision date for the determined option used to fulfill the order, presenting information about the actual fulfilling of the order that has occurred.

[c70] 70. The method of claim 69 wherein the information about the actual fulfilling of the order is presented to the user.

[c71] 71. The method of claim 63 wherein the presented information to the user includes one or more presented controls that are selectable by the user to specify choices related to how one of the determined options will be used to fulfill the order.

[c72] 72. The method of claim 63 including indicating to use one of the determined options to fulfill the order.

[c73] 73. The method of claim 63 wherein the presented information for at least some of the determined options includes an indication of an actual effect that will result from using that determined option to fulfill the order.

[c74] 74. The method of claim 63 wherein the provision date determined for the determined options is a date on which the order is delivered to the recipient when using that determined option to fulfill the order.

[c75] 75. The method of claim 63 wherein the provision date determined for the determined options is a date on which the order is available to the recipient when using that determined option to fulfill the order.

[c76] 76. The method of claim 63 wherein the provision date determined for the determined options is a date on which the order is received by the recipient when using that determined option to fulfill the order.

[c77] 77. A computer-readable medium containing a data structure for use in providing to a user actual fulfillment information for each of multiple fulfillment plans that are options for fulfilling an order, the data structure comprising a multiplicity of entries each representing a fulfillment plan that is an option for fulfilling the order, each entry comprising:

an indication of the fulfillment plan; and

an indication of at least one type of actual fulfillment information that

reflects the fulfilling of the order if the indicated fulfillment plan is used.

[c78] 78. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the types of actual fulfillment information for each represented fulfillment plan include an actual delivery date for the order.

[c79] 79. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the types of actual fulfillment information for each represented fulfillment plan include an actual delivery time for the order.



[c80] 80. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein each entry of the data structure further comprises an indication of a cost to the user of using the fulfillment plan.

[c81] 81. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein each entry of the data structure further comprises an indication of at least one distribution center to be used to fulfill the order, an indication of a manner of transporting the order to a recipient, an indication of one or more processing lanes to be used at each of the indicated distribution centers, an indication of a manner of acquiring at least some items of the order, and/or an indication of a manner of processing at least some of the items at the indicated distribution centers.

[c82] 82. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein each entry of the data structure further comprises an indication of a manner of presenting the actual fulfillment information.

[c83] 83. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein each entry of the data structure further comprises an indication of at least one user-selectable control to be displayed to the user.

[c84] 84. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the data structure is at least part of a Web page to be displayed to the user.

[c85] 85. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the data structure is stored as a multi-dimensional array.

[c86] 86. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the computer-readable medium is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal containing the data structure.

[c87]

87. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the computer-readable medium is one or more computer memories that collectively contain the data structure.

87. The computer-readable medium of claim 77 wherein the computer-readable medium is one or more computer memories that collectively contain the data structure.